

Light shimmers at the edges. A cunning work of the most difficult art. An achievement of hard dedication and study.

It is a simple, white sphere.

Children of Hoa dream of the day when they are able to craft their first mirage. Some never achieve it.

Excitement overflows. Concentration is lost. The simple orb- that long anticipated, *celebrated* orb- evaporates into a thin puff of glowing smoke. This is only the first step. Light, in the simplest form, is shaped into reality through concentration. It is the gift of the Sakura.

But for most, it is not enough to make a simple glowing sphere. Mirage light can be shaped, twisted, hardened, colored, and even given movement, all through the effort of will. The manipulation of light is an important skill.

But what then? What does one make? A twisted, hardened, colorful, moving ball? Certainly not.

Not for nothing, do the children of Hoa study. Not for nothing are they scholars.

To make anything of substance, anything they can touch, taste, smell, or hear, they have to *understand* that thing first.

Some spirits study sugar, the exact way it tastes, crystallizes, and dissolves. They learn how wheat is grown in the fields and how it is milled into flour dust. They learn how colorants are made from the many wildflowers of their valley. And then there is the art of baking itself. It is through this study that such spirits are able to create the perfect... *cupcake*. It does not fill them. But they can eat as many as they like, and they can share their craft with their friends.

Some spirits study fire. They learn the subtle intricacies of its billowing movements, its scalding heat, the way it consumes, and the permanent things it does to whatever it touches. Skill plays a part. They still have to be able to produce enough light and control the heat and its flow. So does safety. Fire is still fire and can take on a life of its own once started.

The musician must learn more than music theory; For their instruments must be made of *something*. They may be made of wood, for example, and have strings of twined metal. Obviously, there is the shape of the instruments themselves: The exact placement of frets, the *exact* tension of strings. There are acoustics, echos, reeds, tubes, and bows. One must learn how the very air *vibrates* to produce sound. Yet an elder, a master of this art, is a symphony all their own.

The interests of the scholarly Hoans are as different as each individual. But whatever they study they can use.

Whatever they love, they study.